

VZCZCXRO3332
RR RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHKP #0136/01 1080659
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 180659Z APR 09
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1039
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0496
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0268
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1858
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0087
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RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4600
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000136

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [EIND](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: SINDH - MARINE LIFE ALONG PAKISTAN'S COAST IN JEOPARDY

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Industry and government officials are concerned over the state of Pakistan's marine life, an issue that could affect the livelihoods of thousands along the country's coast. They claim that the fisheries are threatened by increased toxic waste, illegal fishing, mangrove deforestation, and lax government regulation. In 2007, the European Union (EU) banned exports of seafood from Pakistan because of the poor conditions under which fish and prawn were being caught, landed and processed. An official at the Marine Fisheries Department (MFD) told Post that his organization plans to begin a two-year marine life assessment in April to determine the actual status of the country's fisheries.

FISHERIES AND MARINE STOCKS THREATENED

12. (SBU) Moazam Ali Khan, Director of Research and Planning at the Marine Fisheries Department (MFD), recently told ESTHOff that overfishing, use of harmful nets, environmental degradation and ineffective federal fishing policies have caused depletion of fisheries along coastal Sindh and Balochistan. Khan estimated that marine fishery resources have declined by more than forty percent over the last several years, and warned of a collapse in the next six to ten years if the GOP does not take remedial measures soon. He noted that the discharge of toxic waste from Karachi's industries, especially textiles and tanneries, has diminished marine stocks. According to MFD estimates, Karachi alone is responsible for the daily discharge of over 300 million gallons of untreated industrial and municipal waste into the Arabian Sea.

13. (SBU) Khan said his department plans to initiate a two-year, USD 6.19 million marine life survey in April, the first since 1986, to assess the status of the country's fisheries. The GOP will fund the project while the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) will provide technical assistance.

USG ASSISTANCE

14. (SBU) The USAID-sponsored Competitive Support Fund (CSF) has been engaged with the GOP and the Government of Sindh to upgrade the Karachi Fish Harbor in an effort to get the EU to remove the ban on seafood exports from Pakistan. The EU had originally banned seafood

exports from Pakistan in 2007 due to poor fish/prawn catching conditions. In 2008, CSF prepared a "roadmap" to restructure the Karachi Fish Harbor which included adding hazard analysis and critical control points (HAACP) and modernizing fishing vessels to meet international standards. Officials at CSF expect the project to result eventually in an improvement in the quality of fish being caught.

ILLEGAL FISHING PROBLEMATIC

15. (SBU) Balochistan Director of Fisheries Mohammad Noor Khan cited illegal use of wire and trawl nets by Sindh-based fishing boats as the main concern of Baloch fishermen. Provincial law prohibits non-Balochistan based fishing fleets from using the province's coastal waters, which are delineated up to 12 nautical miles from the coast. Khan called for a doubling of this protected area. He pointed out that over 70 percent of the coastal region of Pakistan is in Balochistan. (Note: Vessels fishing in Balochistan's provincial waters require a license from the Balochistan Fisheries Directorate. End note.)

MANGROVE DEFORESTATION ALSO HURTING MARINE LIFE

16. (SBU) Tahir Qureshi, an official with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) explained that population and industrial growth have led to the destruction of coastal mangrove

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forests which provided shelter for young fish. Forests are being cut to provide cheap building materials, firewood and living space to the area's increasing population. He said annual fish and shrimp harvests have dropped dramatically as a result. Protection of the mangrove forests is difficult, however, as it requires coordination among several agencies. Qureshi claimed that lack of political will, coupled with insufficient legislation, makes it difficult to tackle the increasing mangrove deforestation issue.

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT LACKING

17. (SBU) Fishermen Cooperative Society (FCS) Administrator Mohammad Jaffar Khwaja and President of Sindh Trawlers Association Sahir Mazhar Dada agreed that a corrupt bureaucracy, ineffective provincial government policies, and lax federal oversight of the fishing industry are the root causes of the fishing industry's current problems. They criticized the government's surveillance system as weak and inefficient.

Comment

18. (SBU) Pollution, illegal fishing, mangrove destruction and lax government oversight pose a grave threat to the viability of Pakistan's fishing industry. The Baloch have long complained about the intrusion of unregistered fishing boats from Sindh. The competition for marine harvests will continue, as fisheries decline along the coast, threatening the livelihoods of thousands who depend on the industry for employment. The MFD survey, if it actually materializes (it has already been delayed a month), could go a long way toward assessing the actual damage to the Pakistani fishing industry, which might spur the government to take action. But because of the huge burdens on the GOP and provincial budgets, we question whether measures to save the fisheries will materialize unless the international community steps up its focus. The CSF project represents a first step towards improving the Karachi Fish Harbor; however, more focus needs to be given to environmental conditions along the coast.

FAKAN